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FM USEU BRUSSELS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000978

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS
DEPT FOR EUR/ERA, EUR/RPM

E.O.: 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: JERZY BUZEK ELECTED EP PRESIDENT

¶1. (U) Summary: The European Parliament (EP) on July 14 elected as its new president former Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, the candidate of the European Peoples' Party (EPP-Christian Democrats). Buzek, a confirmed proponent of strong transatlantic ties, included the "strategic alliance with the U.S." as one of his priorities in his opening address, a sentiment further echoed to Poloff by his new Deputy Chief of the Cabinet. The EP President wields considerable behind the scenes influence over the European Parliament, which itself is growing much more powerful in EU policy-making, although it is not yet the equal of the Commission or Council. The Presidency is also a very prestigious post and the vote was the culmination of months of lobbying by the Polish government. End Summary.

JERZY BUZEK

¶2. (U) The 736 newly-elected Members of the European Parliaments met for their first plenary session in Strasbourg on July 14 and elected Jerzy Buzek to be the new EP President with 555 votes in favor (or 86.18 per cent of the valid votes). He will replace the outgoing President Hans-Gert Pöttering (EPP, Germany).

¶3. (SBU) The sixty-nine year old Buzek, a scientist by training, started his political career in the 1980s as an activist of the anti-communist Solidarity trade union movement. He was elected to the Polish Parliament (the Sejm) in the 1997 elections and was soon thereafter appointed the prime minister of Poland, a position he retained until his party was defeated in 2001. He guided Poland into NATO in 1999 and initiated accession negotiations with the EU in 1997. According to Buzek's deputy Chief of Cabinet, Anthony Teasdale, Buzek is now very popular in Poland, with a recent poll of possible presidential candidates showing him ahead of Poland's current President Lech Kaczynski and current PM Donald Tusk if elections were to take place at this stage.

BUZEK AND THE UNITED STATES

¶4. (SBU) Although as an MEP he has been politically more engaged on relations with Russia and Eastern European countries, Buzek remains a confirmed proponent of strong transatlantic ties. According to Teasdale, Buzek will emphasize building bridges with the U.S Congress and administration, with a specific interest in environmental, scientific and energy issues. "The President told me last Friday that his main priority was to surf on the Obama popularity wave to build cross-party support for increased cooperation with the U.S.," Teasdale told us.

¶5. (SBU) During a July 14 meeting with Emboffs shortly following Buzek's election, Teasdale outlined the President's vision for strengthening transatlantic ties. According to Teasdale, Buzek will be pushing hard to get President Obama to address the European Parliament, stating that such a speech "would solidify pro-American sentiment in the Parliament for a long time." Buzek plans to travel to the U.S., possibly in the spring of 2010 during "Euro Week," but, Teasdale explained, he would need to "get meetings at the right

level." (Teasdale did not specify what that means.) There are also plans to institutionalize a recent Parliamentary staff delegation to Congress as an annual event and expand video conferencing with Hill staffers. Teasdale confirmed that the budget now allocates funding for a permanent European Parliament office in Washington.

STRONG SUPPORT FROM ALL GROUPS

¶6. (U) The EP President wields considerable "behind the scenes" influence over the European Parliament, which is growing much more powerful commission.

A CONTESTED POLITICAL DEAL

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¶8. (U) Buzek's EP Presidency election was secured by a deal between the two largest EP political groups, the Christian Democrats (EPP-ED) and the Socialists (S&D). Under their agreement, Buzek will step down halfway through the five-year legislative term to make way for a socialist president, expected to be the PASD group leader, Martin Schulz. This "technical deal" between the two largest groups to share the presidency is a tradition but is systematically criticized by the other political groups and by the press as a practice denying real democratic elections for the top job. The British former leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group, Graham Watson, ran for president and tried to break the deal but, having failed to do so, withdrew his bid on July 7, opening the way for the overwhelming vote for Buzek.

MURRAY